

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. An automated analyzer comprising:

(A) a transport mechanism for transporting a reaction receptacle from one location within said automated analyzer to another location, the reaction receptacle including a manipulating structure, said transport mechanism comprising:

(1) a receptacle carrier assembly constructed and arranged to be rotatable about an axis of rotation and to receive a reaction receptacle and carry the reaction receptacle while said receptacle carrier assembly is rotating about said axis of rotation;

(2) a manipulating hook member interrelated with said receptacle carrier assembly so as to be movable with respect thereto, said manipulating hook member being constructed and arranged to be engageable with the manipulating structure of the reaction receptacle; and

(3) a hook member drive assembly including a hook motor having fixed structure carried by said receptacle carrier assembly in a fixed position with respect thereto and a lead screw mechanism including a threaded shaft oriented in a generally radial direction with respect to said axis of rotation and having an end coupled to said manipulating hook member, said lead screw mechanism being operatively coupled with said hook motor and being constructed and arranged to convert powered motion of said hook motor into movement of said threaded shaft with respect to said fixed structure of said hook motor in either axial direction of said threaded shaft to thereby cause corresponding movement of said manipulating hook member with respect to said receptacle carrier assembly so that a reaction receptacle engaged by said manipulating hook member can be moved with respect to said receptacle carrier assembly; and

(B) an incubator for receiving a plurality of the reaction receptacles containing reaction fluids and maintaining the reaction fluids in a temperature controlled environment, said incubator comprising:

(1) a housing including a receptacle access opening formed therein for allowing movement of a reaction receptacle into or out of said housing through said receptacle access opening;

(2) a command-responsive closure mechanism connected to said housing in proximal relation to said receptacle access opening, said command-responsive closure mechanism being constructed and arranged to be movable between a closed position and

32 an open position with respect to said receptacle access opening in response to  
33 corresponding closure movement commands to prevent or permit access to said housing  
34 through said access opening, said housing and said command-responsive closure  
35 mechanism constituting an enclosure defining an incubation chamber therein;

36 (3) a heat source in thermal communication with said incubation chamber;

37 (4) a receptacle carrier disposed within said incubation chamber and  
38 including a plurality of receptacle stations, each of said receptacle stations being  
39 constructed and arranged to carry a single reaction receptacle, said receptacle carrier  
40 being constructed and arranged to present any of said plurality of receptacle stations in a  
41 receptacle transfer position with respect to said access opening,

42 said incubator being positioned radially outside an arc swung by said receptacle carrier  
43 assembly of said transport mechanism to permit said receptacle carrier assembly to rotate  
44 without interference from said incubator and said incubator being oriented so that said access  
45 opening is positioned adjacent the arc swung by said receptacle carrier assembly of said transport  
46 mechanism to permit said transport mechanism to:

47 (a) insert a reaction receptacle carried thereby through said access opening and into  
48 an empty one of said plurality of receptacle stations by rotating said receptacle carrier assembly  
49 into cooperative alignment with said receptacle access opening and moving said manipulating  
50 hook member in a first direction with respect to said receptacle carrier assembly when said  
51 command-responsive closure mechanism is in said open position to move the reaction receptacle  
52 from said receptacle carrier assembly, through said receptacle access opening, and into supported  
53 engagement within the empty receptacle station; and

54 (b) remove a reaction receptacle from a receptacle station of said receptacle carrier by  
55 rotating said receptacle carrier assembly into cooperative alignment with said receptacle access  
56 opening and moving said manipulating hook member in said first direction when said command-  
57 responsive closure mechanism is in said open position to insert at least a portion of said  
58 manipulating hook member through said receptacle access opening to engage the manipulating  
59 structure of the reaction receptacle carried in said receptacle station and subsequently moving  
60 said manipulating hook member in a second direction with respect to said reaction receptacle  
61 carrier assembly to draw the reaction receptacle from said receptacle station, through said  
62 receptacle access opening, and into supported engagement within said receptacle carrier  
63 assembly.

1           2.       An automated system for isolating and amplifying a target nucleic acid sequence  
2 which may be present in a fluid sample contained in a reaction receptacle, said automated system  
3 comprising:

4           a transport mechanism constructed and arranged to transport the reaction receptacle to  
5 each of a plurality of stations of said system;

6           a separation station constructed and arranged to separate the target sequence from non-  
7 target nucleic acid which may be present in the fluid sample; and

8           an amplifying incubation station comprising one or more incubators, each said incubator  
9 of said amplifying incubation station defining a temperature-controlled chamber constructed and  
10 arranged to receive the reaction receptacle and to incubate the contents of the reaction receptacle,  
11 to which one or more amplification reagents have been provided, for a period of time and under  
12 conditions sufficient to permit the target sequence to be amplified.

1           3.       The automated system of claim 2, further comprising:

2           an immobilizing incubation station comprising one or more incubators, each said  
3 incubator of said immobilizing incubation station defining a temperature-controlled chamber  
4 constructed and arranged to receive the reaction receptacle and incubate the contents of the  
5 reaction receptacle, to which a solid support material has been provided, for a period of time and  
6 under conditions sufficient to permit the target nucleic acid sequence to be immobilized by the  
7 solid support material,

8           wherein said separation station is constructed and arranged to separate the target  
9 sequence from the non-target nucleic acid by a separation procedure which includes isolating the  
10 solid support material within the reaction receptacle and removing the fluid sample therefrom.

1           4.       The automated system of claim 3, wherein said immobilizing and amplifying  
2 incubation stations are independent of one another or share at least one incubator in common.

1           5.       The automated system of claim 3, wherein said immobilizing and amplifying  
2 incubation stations are independent of one another.